

# A Gentleman from Mississippi

By THOMAS A. WISE

Novelized From the Play by Frederick R. Toombs  
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(Continued from Last Week.)

continually as he waxed warmer in his efforts to impress the senator's secretary.

"I tell you, Mr. Haines, Gulf City, sah, leads all the south when it comes to choosin' ground for a naval base. Her vast expanse of crystal sea, her miles upon miles of silv'ly sands, sah, protected by a natural harbor and the islands of Mississippi sound, make her th' only spot to be considered. She's God's own choice and the people's, too, for a naval base."

"But unfortunately congress also has something to say about choosin' it," spoke Haines.

"To be shuah they do," said Gulf City's mayor, "but—"

"And there was a man here from Altacoola yesterday," again interrupted the secretary, "who said that Gulf City was fit only to be the state refuge for aged and indigent frogs."

"Say, they ain't a man in Altacoola wot can speak th' truth," indignantly shrieked the old colonel, almost losing control of himself, "because their heads is always a-buzzin' and a-hummin' from th' quinine they have to take to keep the fever away, sah."

The mayor sat directly in front of Haines, at the opposite side of his desk. Regainin' his composure, he suddenly leaned forward and half whispered to the secretary:

"Mah young friend, don't let Senator Langdon get switched away from Gulf City by them cheap skates from Altacoola. Now, if you'll get th' senator to vote for Gulf City we'll see—I'll see, sah, as an officer of th' Gulf City Land company—that you get taken cash of."

Haines' eyes opened wide.

"Go on, colonel; go on with your offer," he said.

"Well, I'll see that a block of stock, sah—a big block—is set aside for Senator Langdon an' another for you, too. We've made this arrangement elsewhere. They'll outbid Altacoola everah time. They're po' sports an' hate to give up."

"So Altacoola is bidding, too?" excitedly asked Haines.

"Why, of co'se it is. Ah yo' as blind as that 'ah yo' foolin' with me?" questioned Telfer suspiciously.

"Seems to me yo' ought to know more about that end of it than a fellow clear from th' gulf."

"Certainly," mumbled Haines impatiently as he endeavored to associate coherently, intelligently, in his mind these startling new revelations of Telfer with certain incidents he had previously noted in the operations of the committee on naval affairs.

Then he looked across at the mayor and smiled. Apparently he had heard nothing to amaze him.

"Colonel," he returned calmly, dropping into a voice that sounded of pity for the gray hairs of the lobbyist, "about fifty men a day come to me with propositions like that. There is nothing doing, colonel. I couldn't possibly interest Senator Langdon, because he has the faculty of judging for himself, and he would be prejudiced against either town that came out with such a proposition."

"Lan' speculation is legitimate," protested the colonel cunningly.

Haines agreed.

"Certainly—by outsiders. But it's d—d thievery when engaged in by any one connected with putting a bill through. If I were to tell Senator Langdon what you told me, he would decide him unalterably in favor of Altacoola. Senator Langdon, sir, is one of the few men in Washington who would rather be thought a fool than a grafter if it came down to that."

The mayor of Gulf City jumped to his feet, his face blazing in rage, not in shame.

"Seems to me yo're mighty fresh, young man," he blustered. "What kind of politics is Langdon playin'?"

"Not fresh, colonel; only friendly. I'm just tipping you off how not to be a friend to Altacoola. As to his politics, the senator will answer you himself."

A scornful laugh accompanied Telfer's reply.

"Altacoola, huh! I reckon yo' must be a fool, atah yo'! Why, everybody knows of the speculatin' in land around Altacoola, and everybody knows it ain't outsiders that's doin' it. It's the insiders, right here in Washington. If yo' ain't in, yo' can easy get a latchkey. Young man, yo'll find out things some day, and yo'll drop to it all."

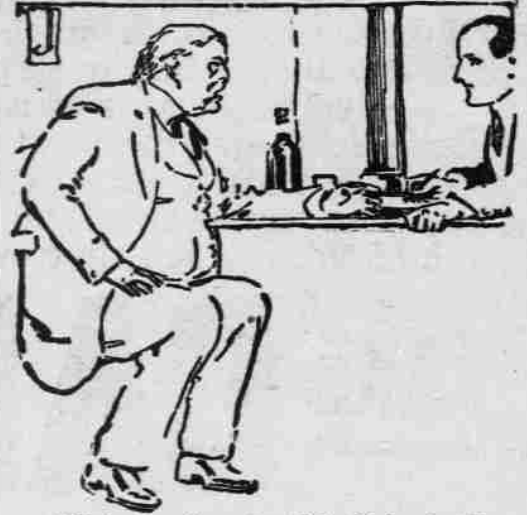
"I guess I was too late with yo'. That's about the size of it. I guess Altacoola 'll talk to yo'." went on the mayor. "If that Telfer Fairbrother of Altacoola had been able to hold his tongue maybe I wouldn't know so much. But now I know what's what. I know this—that yo're either a big fool or an insider. Yo're a nice young fellow. I have kind-a taken a fancy to yo'. I like to see yo' young fellows get along and not miss yo' chances. Come, my boy, get wise to yo'reself, get wise to yo'reself! Climb on to the band wagon with yo' friends."

But concluded that he might be able to get more definite information out of Telfer if he humored him a bit.

"I tell you, colonel," he finally said, "these are pretty grave charges yo're making, but I'll tell you confidentially, owing to your liking for me, that it is not yet too late to do something for Gulf City. Now, just suppose you and I dine together tonight early, and we'll go over the whole ground to see how things lie. Will you?"

The colonel held out his hand, smiling broadly. He felt that at last he had won the secretary over; that the young man was at heart anxious to take money for his influence with the senator.

"All right, my boy, yo're on. We'll dine together. Yo' are absolutely certain that it won't be too late to get to Senator Langdon?"



"Get wise to yo'reself! Get wise!"

"Absolutely positive. I wouldn't make a mistake in a matter like this, would I, unless I was what you said I was—a fool?"

"Of course not. Oh, yo're a slick one. I like to do business with folks like yo'. It's mighty education!"

"Thanks," answered Bud dryly. "It's certain that Langdon won't decide which place he's for until tomorrow. I promise you that he won't decide until after I have my talk with you."

"Yo' see," said Telfer, "I asked that question because, as yo' probably know, Congressman Norton and his crowd is pretty close to Senator Langdon."

Haines cut him short with a gasp of surprise.

"Norton?"

Telfer, wrinkling his forehead incredulously, looked at Haines. "Sures, thing you know, my boy."

Bud turned his head away in thought. "Oh, leave the Norton outfit to me, I'll fool them," he finally said.

"Good."

Telfer shook the secretary's hand heartily.

"Yo're no fool, my boy. Anybody can see that—after they get to know yo' all. That's what comes of bein' one of them smooth New Yorkers. They 'pear mighty sanctimonious on th' outside, but on th' inside they're the real goods, all right."

The lobbyist hurried away, his blubrous soul swelling with satisfaction. He was sure of triumphing over Altacoola, and he was willing to pay the price.

Haines sank into his chair. "I wonder what Washington 'insiders,'" he murmured, "are speculating in Altacoola land. Telfer mentions Norton's name. I wonder—"

The door opened, and before him stood Carolina Langdon.

"Ah, Miss Langdon," he exclaimed. "I am glad to see you!"

She walked to him and extended cordially a slender gloved hand.

"This is a real pleasure, Mr. Haines," she began. "I've been waiting to talk to you for some time. It's about some thing important."

"Something important," smiled Haines. "You want to see me about something important? Well, let me tell you a secret. Every time I see you it is an important occasion to me."

Carolina Langdon had never appeared more charming, more beautiful to young Haines than she did that day. Perhaps she appeared more inspiring because of the contrast her presence afforded to the unpleasant episodes through which he had just passed; also Carolina was dressed in her most becoming street gown, which she well realized, as she was enacting a carefully planned part with the unfortunate secretary.

His frankness and the sincere admiration that shone in his eyes caused her to falter momentarily, almost make her weaker in her purpose, but she made an effort and secured a firmer grip on herself, for she must play a role that would crush to earth the air castle this young secretary was building, a role that would crush the ideals of this young optimist as well.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE LURE OF A WOMAN'S LOVE

CAROLINA had come to find out from Haines, if possible, how her father was going to vote on the naval base and to vote on the naval base and to vote on the naval base.

Induce the secretary to persuade him to stand for Altacoola—if there seemed danger that he would vote for an other site. That was her scheme, for Carolina had put \$25,000 into Altacoola land, money left by her mother.

Norton had persuaded Carolina to invest in the enterprise to defraud the government, promising her \$50,000 clear profit. How much she could do in Washington society with that!

The continued uncertainty over her father's final attitude had strained her nerves almost to the breaking, for the success of the conspiracy depended on his vote. Not even the words of Norton, her future husband, could reassure her. Her worry was increased by the knowledge of Randolph's investment of her father's \$50,000.

That Carolina must sacrifice Haines on the altar of her consuming desire for money, for a higher worldly position, was an unimportant consideration. He stood in the way. Any moment he might discover the existence of the Altacoola scheme, he would immediately tell her father, and she knew her father would immediately decide against Altacoola—the bright hopes of her future would turn to ashes. Norton's money as well was invested in Altacoola. He, too, would be ruined. She was sure that she loved Norton. But she could not marry a penniless man.

Carolina resumed the conversation.

"It isn't anything so very important, Mr. Haines. It's about father."

Haines beamed.

"I have the honor to report, Miss Langdon," he bowed, "that your father is making the very best kind of a senator."

The girl hesitated.

"Yes; he might if he had some ambition."

"Don't worry! If he comes down to that, I have ambition for two. You want him to be a success, don't you? Well, he is the biggest kind of a success."

"I never believed that he would be," confessed the daughter.

Haines laughed.

"Why, do you realize that today he is one of the most popular men in public life throughout the country; that 'What does Langdon think?' has become the watchword of the big body of independents who want honesty and decent government without graft?"

"I tell you that's a big thing, Miss Langdon. That's success—real success in politics, especially in Washington politics."

"Now, if there's anything else you want him to have, I'll see that he gets it. I'll try to get it for him—he paused a moment, then added, with heart-felt meaning in his voice—"and for you, Miss Langdon."

Carolina played coquettishly with the secretary.

"For me, Mr. Haines?" she questioned archly, with an effective glance into his eyes.

Bud's pulses began to throb violently to leap.

"Yes," he exclaimed unsteadily, "for you, and you know it. That's the inspiration now."

My inspiration—the chance of winning your belief in me, of winning something more, the biggest thing I ever thought to win—because, Miss Langdon—Carolina—I love you."

He bent over and seized the girl's hand. "Ever since the day I first saw you!"

She shook her head indulgently. "And for you, Miss Langdon."

He drew her hand from his.

"You mustn't be so serious, Mr. Haines. You don't understand southern girls at all. We are not just like northern girls. We are used to being made love to from the time we are knee high. Sometimes I fear we flirt a little, but we don't mean any harm. All girls flirt a little."

"But somebody wins even the southern girls," declared Haines eagerly.

"The girl's face became serious, earnest, sincere."

"Yes, somebody does, always," she said. "And when a southern girl is won she stays won, Mr. Haines."

"And I have a chance to win?" questioned the determined young northerner.

Carolina smiled sweetly and expressively.

"Who knows? First make my father even a bigger success—that's first. Oh I wonder if you can realize what all this life means to me! If you can realize what those years of stagnating on the plantation meant to me! No man would have endured it!" she exclaimed bitterly.

"I am more of a man than a woman in some ways; I'm ambitious. From the time I was a little girl I've wanted the world's power, fame, money."

"I mean to get them myself, some one must get them for me."

"And love?" suggested the man.

"You are leaving love out. Suppose I get all these things for you?"

Bud's bounding heart almost stopped. He could scarcely gain his breath as he saw creep into Carolina's eyes what he believed to be the light of hope for him, the light even of a woman's promise.

"Who knows, Mr. Haines? There's no reward guaranteed. There may be others trying," she answered.

Haines laughed—the strong, hopeful, fighting laugh of the man who would combat the boss of the senate on ground of his own choosing.

"All right!" he cried. "If it's an open fight I'll enlist. I'll give them all a run. What are your orders?"

Carolina appeared indifferent.

"I don't know that I have any particular orders, sir knight, except to see that my father does all he can for the Altacoola naval base."

Miss Langdon held out her hand impulsively.

"Then it will be Altacoola!" she cried. "Thank you, Mr. Haines. We are partners, then, for Altacoola."

The young man grasped her hand earnestly.

"I'd like to be your partner for good, Carolina!" he cried.

They stood there close together, holding each other's hands, looking into each other's eyes, when the door opened and in came Charles Norton.

## CHAPTER XIII.

AN OLD FASHIONED FATHER. CONGRESSMAN NORTON was startled visibly at the sight of Carolina and Haines apparently so wrapped up in each other. Perhaps she was getting interested in the handsome, interfering secretary. That a woman sometimes breaks her promise to wed he well knew. Plainly Carolina was carrying things too far for a girl who was the promised wife of another.

Carolina and Haines showed surprise at Norton's entrance.

The congressman advanced and spoke sneeringly, his demeanor marking him to be in a dangerous mood.

"Do I intrude?" he drawled deliberately.

Carolina drew away her hands from Haines and faced the newcomer.

"Intrude!" she exclaimed contemptuously, a tone that Norton construed as in his favor and Haines in his own.

"Intrude!" Haines laughed sarcastically, feeling that now he was leader in the race for love against this Mississippi representative, who was, he knew, a subservient tool and a taker of bribes. "You surely do intrude, Norton. Wouldn't any man who had interrupted a tete-a-tete another man was having with Miss Langdon be intruding?"

"I suppose I can't deny that," he replied.

The secretary smiled again.

"I'll match you to see who stays," he said.

But Norton's turn to defeat his rival had come. He held out a paper to Haines.

"Senator Langdon gave me this for you. I reckon I don't have to match." The secretary opened the note to read.

"Where in thunder does that hydrate come from—South America or Russia? How much off on the tariff on the creature do we want? Come over to the committee room, where I am, right away. Say it's an urgent message and get in with a tip."

The secretary looked up, with a laugh.

"You win, Norton. I'm off. Good-by." And he started on a run to the senator's aid.

Norton turned angrily on the girl as the door closed.

"See here, Carolina," he cried, "what do you mean by letting that fellow make love to you?"

Carolina Langdon would not permit rebuke, even from the man she cared for. She tossed back her head and said coolly:

"Why shouldn't I let him make love to me if I choose?"

"You know why," exclaimed Norton, his dark face flushing sullenly. "Because I love you and you love me!" And he seized her and pressed her to him. "That is why!" he cried, and he kissed her again and again.

"Yes, I love you, Charlie; you know that," Carolina said simply. She was conquered by the southerner's masterfulness.

"Then why do you stand for that whippersnapper's talk?" asked Norton perplexedly.

Carolina laughed.

"Don't you see, Charlie, I have to stand for it? I have to stand for it for your sake, for Randolph's sake, for my own sake, for all our sakes. You know the influence he has over father."

"He can make father do anything he wants, and suppose I don't lead him on? Where's our project? Let him suspect a thing and let him go to father, and you know what will happen. Father would turn against that Altacoola scheme in a moment. He'd beggar himself, if it were necessary, rather than let a single one of us make a dollar out of a thing he had to decide."

"You're right, I reckon, Carolina," said Norton dejectedly. "Your father is a real type of the southern gentleman. He hasn't seen any real money in so long he can't even bear to think of it. Somebody's got to make money out of this, and we should be the ones."

"We'd lose frightfully, Charlie, if they changed to Gulf City, wouldn't we?" said the girl apprehensively.

"I'm horribly afraid sometimes, Charlie. That's why I came here today. I wanted to influence Haines, to keep him straight. Is there any danger that they'll change? You don't think there is, do you?"

"Of course not, child. Stevens has got his money in, and Penbody. There are only five on the committee. It's bound to go through."

"Then why is father so important to them?" asked Carolina.

"It's past my understanding, Carolina. I don't see how he's done it, but the whole country has come to believe whatever your father does is right and they've got to have him."

"And father is completely under the domination of this secretary," murmured the girl thoughtfully.

(To Be Continued.)



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